

# **Comparison of Christianity and Buddhism**

## **Introduction:**

Chinese people often take pride in the 5,000 years of Chinese civilization, known as cultural confidence. However, this often leads to stagnation. When we look at the current state of Chinese society—moral decline and profit-driven behavior—we should recognize that there are issues within our culture. In reality, Chinese culture has been constrained by the ideology of the Great Wall, considering Confucianism and Daoist philosophy as profound enough, believing that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism are sufficient. Chinese culture has historically been rarely exported; what has been spread outward was mainly material goods like silk and porcelain. Today, China is a manufacturing hub, exporting a large number of products. Culturally, Chinese people remain stagnant and self-satisfied.

Modernization is seen as Westernization, and we Chinese need to understand and learn from Western culture, especially for us Chinese living in the United States. Western culture is mainly rooted in Christian culture. For a long time, Christian culture has not been widely accepted by Chinese people due to political and historical reasons. Many Chinese view Christianity as a foreign religion, an imperialist religion, brought by the invasion of the Eight-Nation Alliance. Therefore, Christian culture has not truly integrated into Chinese culture, while Buddhism has successfully merged with it, forming the unique Chinese blend of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism.

In Western culture, American culture differs from European culture. The United States was founded on Puritan culture and civilization, which significantly changed the world. The United States was established as a Christian nation, a constitutional democracy built on Puritan theology.

At that time, the Church of England, akin to an autocratic monarchy, was led by Queen Elizabeth I, who established the Act of Uniformity, declaring the Church of England as the only church, where Puritans were forced to operate. This led to dissatisfaction among Puritans who hoped for religious reform. Under long-term suppression, in 1620, after a 66-day voyage, 102 Puritans landed at Portsmouth, Massachusetts, in the New World. Among them, 41 men signed the Mayflower Compact. They were impoverished, unfamiliar with the new land, and separated from the Church of England, which had led to their expulsion from England. With the ideal of building a great nation and government, they came to the New World and established a democratic and constitutional state.

To better understand Eastern and Western cultures, we will discuss this together over the next two classes.

## **A Comparison of Christianity and Buddhism**

In the view of the Chinese people, there are five commonly recognized religions in the world: 1. Buddhism, 2. Daoism, 3. Confucianism, 4. Catholicism, Christianity, and Eastern Orthodoxy, and 5. Islam (Hui religion). Chinese people have traditionally believed in Buddhism and Daoism, with Buddhism being one of the earliest adopted religions in China. There is a saying about Chinese people: “Every household has Amitabha, and every home worships Guanyin.” Both Buddhism and Christianity are among the five major religions officially recognized by the Chinese government. Both religions are

non-native to China; Buddhism came from India (more precisely, present-day Nepal), and Christianity came from the Middle East. Buddhism was introduced to China around the Han Dynasty, while Christianity started entering China during the Tang Dynasty.

In China, the process of localization for Buddhism was faster and more adaptable compared to Christianity, allowing it to integrate into mainstream society and be accepted by the ruling class earlier. Buddhism was introduced during the Han Dynasty but truly flourished during the Tang Dynasty. Why was this? The rise of Buddhism in China was also due to political reasons, linked to military conquests and cultural invasions by foreign powers. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, tens of thousands of Xianbei troops arrived in the Central Plains, and they practiced Buddhism, bringing about its prosperity. The Sui and Tang periods were the peak of Buddhism in China, representing a form of foreign cultural intrusion. The story of Shaolin Temple is well-known: murals in the temple show monks aiding Emperor Li Shimin (a Xianbei) in battle, leading to the famous story of “Thirteen Monks Saving the Tang King.” Li Shimin himself had Xianbei blood through his mother, making the Li-Tang dynasty a mixed Hu-Han ruling era. Many of the original murals in Dunhuang were funded by the Xianbei people.

Chinese Buddhism differs from Indian Buddhism. Separated by the Himalayas, it could not directly reach China but was transmitted through Central Asia, undergoing changes influenced by other cultures and differing from the original Indian form. In Chinese folk society, Buddhism evolved into popular beliefs and became a mixed form of idol worship. It was easily accepted by both the common people and emperors. For instance, in India, Guanyin is male, but in China, it became female to cater to the psychological need for a compassionate, motherly savior. This adaptation also meant that there was no competition with male emperors, making Buddhism politically more acceptable.

Chinese Buddhism mainly follows the Mahayana tradition. Although the doctrinal essence may not be the same as the original, it has completed a localization process, becoming part of the beliefs and lifestyle of the Chinese people. In Chinese history, Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism coexisted. Both Daoism and Buddhism, along with Confucianism, used morality to educate people, believing that moral teachings were sometimes more effective than laws. The feudal society of China practiced governance through moral values, unlike the West, which relied on rule by law. However, the concept of “governance through virtue” had significant issues, often blurring the line between morality and law, making it, in essence, rule by men.

Christianity, with its emphasis on the uniqueness of truth, entered China centuries later than Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, facing great resistance as these religions already dominated the religious landscape. During the late Kangxi era of the Qing Dynasty and after Yongzheng’s ascension to the throne, large-scale expulsion of missionaries and strict anti-Christian measures were taken due to the Rites Controversy. Although Christianity has seen remarkable growth in recent years among the public and intellectuals, in terms of localization and cultural missionary work, it is still in the early “groundbreaking” phase.

My mother is a Buddhist and has a bronze statue of Guanyin at home. She often burns incense and prays for the family's happiness and safety. Influenced by her, I also practiced burning incense and praying during my twenties and thirties, visiting temples whenever I traveled to famous scenic spots in China, like the Lingyin Temple in Hangzhou, which I visited several times. There is an interesting

observation: Buddhists, including monks or nuns, generally do not strongly urge their close friends or relatives to become monastics. However, Christians who trust in Christ often see preaching to their friends and family as their highest mission.

## **I. Theology:**

**Buddhism:** In terms of theology, Buddhism essentially leans towards atheism. It does not recognize a final cause of the universe, nor does it acknowledge a supreme ruler or creator of the cosmos. Buddhism denies the existence and creative power of God, believing instead that the origin of the world follows the natural cycle of formation, existence, destruction, and emptiness. Everything comes into being due to causality and changes with conditions. There is nothing eternal or unchanging in the universe, and happiness is rare; thus, impermanence prevails. Impermanence implies that there is no soul and no god; ultimately, everything is empty. The essence of Buddhism is atheistic. The most revered figure in Buddhism is Shakyamuni Buddha, but even he is not considered a god and did not instruct others to worship him as one.

Buddhism believes that all things are formed through the interdependence of the four major elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. It teaches that humans are not created by a god or higher will. The original meaning of "Buddha" is "enlightenment," and "Buddha" signifies "one who is awakened." Beings rely on their own awakening, as there is no god to "save" them; they can only rely on themselves. Buddhism emphasizes causality and emptiness, forming an inherently pessimistic philosophy and an atheistic worldview.

The Cycle of Formation, Existence, Destruction, and Emptiness (成住坏空): All things in the universe, including animals, plants, insects, fish, birds, beasts, and humans, as well as visible and invisible matter, inevitably follow this cycle once they are created or born.

Formation (成): Refers to creation, development, growth, maturity, and completion. For example, glass material processed and manufactured into a wine glass represents "formation."

Existence (住): The period in which beings or objects exist, representing "stay," "reside," or "temporary existence." After forming, all life and matter only "stay" temporarily, like a guest or transient presence.

Destruction (坏): A wine glass, once created, may eventually break, shatter, or be destroyed, signifying "destruction."

Emptiness (空): After the destruction, it becomes "emptiness." Broken glass disposed of in a recycling bin represents "emptiness."

Collapsed houses, buildings, bridges, destroyed objects, and the end of living beings—all individual entities inevitably complete their journey and become "empty." This "emptiness" then leads to a cycle of reincarnation, starting anew as a different being or form of life, repeating the process of "formation, existence, destruction, and emptiness" in another time and space.

"Emptiness" (空) represents the endpoint, conclusion, void, death, emptiness, blankness, nonexistence, and absence. However, emptiness also encompasses infinite "real existence." The universe, vast and seemingly empty, holds countless stars within this vast expanse. Isn't air also present within this emptiness?

When a wine glass completes its purpose and its shattered pieces are thrown into a recycling bin, they enter a cycle of rebirth and renewal. Before long, the glass may be displayed in a store, ready to be purchased, and once again experience the cycle of "formation, existence, destruction, and emptiness."

**Christianity:** God is described as omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, all-knowing, and all-loving—the one and only almighty creator of the universe and everything in it. Christianity is exclusive in its beliefs. The God of Christianity is characterized as follows: 1、 God hates sin. 2、 Not following God is considered sinful. Conclusion: God hates anything that does not follow Him. Therefore, only the Christian God exists, and He is fundamentally opposed to anything that does not follow Him.

Jesus said, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." [Matthew 12:30] "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." [Mark 16:16] "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them." [John 3:36]

In Christianity, "God's love" is expressed in God's way, not necessarily in a way that people may accept or understand. For example, God casting those who do not believe in Him into the lake of fire and sulfur is also considered an act of love toward those who reject Him. In short, Christianity believes that God decides everything, and whatever He does is done in love.

## 1. Creation Theory:

- **Buddhism:** The world is formed by the convergence of conditions, with the belief that all is empty and there is no plan or purpose.
- **Christianity:** The world is created by God out of love, with purpose, a plan, and meaning.

## Divine Nature:

- **Christianity:** Jesus taught through words and performed miracles to save people.
- **Buddhism:** Shakyamuni had no ability to perform miracles and only taught people to strive for self-cultivation through his teachings.

## 2. Basis of Belief:

- **Buddhism:** Focuses on self-centered enlightenment. Buddhism does not have one authoritative text; various works by Buddhist figures may become revered as scriptures over time. Therefore, the Buddhist canon is vast and complex, making it difficult to summarize its teachings in a single phrase. The objects of worship vary, with some sects recently focusing on Shakyamuni, Amitabha, and Guanyin Bodhisattva. However, Buddhist texts do not state that these figures are supreme gods; Amitabha is one of countless Buddhas, and Guanyin is still in the process of cultivation and has not reached Buddhahood. Thus, Buddhism is more like a personal philosophy without the concept of a supreme deity.

Buddhist teachings are difficult to popularize because of their complexity, depth, and the vastness of the doctrine.

- **Christianity:** The Bible is the sole authoritative scripture. Christianity's global spread is largely due to having a central, representative text—the Bible—that encapsulates its teachings and beliefs. This focal point makes it easier to propagate. Can Buddhism claim such a single, authoritative book?

Christianity's Bible, the absolute authority, declares that the one true God of the universe—Jehovah—is the truth, the Word that existed from the beginning, self-existent and eternal. He is the supreme power, intelligence, love, holiness, justice, and a personal being with independent will and emotions.

### 3. Origin of the Concept of the Tao (道):

**Buddhism:** When Buddhism entered China, it altered the Chinese perspective on the worship of “Heaven” and God. Before Buddhism's arrival, that is, before the Qin Dynasty, Chinese people's worship of God and understanding of the “Tao” (道) were closest to Christian beliefs, even more so than Greek culture. Laozi's explanation and understanding of the “Tao” were very close to Christianity, except that Laozi viewed the “Tao” as a rule without personhood (lacking love and emotion).

**Christianity:** Jesus Christ is the incarnate “Tao”(Word), the “Tao” of all creation. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him, all things were made; without Him, nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:1-3). Believers can establish a relationship with a personal God through faith in Him. In Christianity, the “Tao” (Word) is personal, possessing will and emotion and characterized by love—God is love. “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us” (1 John 4:12). “God is love, and whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them” (1 John 4:16). God embodies both love and order.

**Daoism (Taoism):** Laozi provided a clear discourse on the “Tao,” viewing it as a vague, underlying law governing the world, with all things in existence naturally following this law. In Chapter 25 of the “Tao Te Ching” , Laozi describes the “Tao”: “There was something undifferentiated and yet complete, which existed before Heaven and Earth. Soundless and formless, it stands alone and does not change. It pervades everywhere without end. It can be regarded as the Mother of the universe. I do not know its name; I call it the ‘Tao.’” In Chapter 42, Laozi states: “The Tao gave birth to One. One gave birth to Two. Two gave birth to Three. Three gave birth to all things.” Laozi's “Tao” lacks personhood and attributes of love; it is more of a law or rule.

**Buddhism:** Shakyamuni himself is not the “Tao” but a seeker of it, a wandering ascetic devoted to finding and understanding the path.

### 4. Object of Faith:

**Buddhism:** Buddhism is fundamentally nihilistic and atheistic, with no specific object of faith. Shakyamuni is regarded as a teacher, not a deity. Despite this atheistic foundation, in practice, Buddhism in China involves the worship of various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, resulting in a form of idol worship. Many intricate and tall statues are built across the country, which contradicts its claim of atheism. While Buddhism promotes an atheistic philosophy, many people in China treat figures like Amitabha as gods, seeking their protection and blessings. For example, the famous Leshan Giant Buddha was intended to

protect the local people and ensure the safety of those traveling by boat, representing a form of idol worship. Chinese Buddhism involves a contradiction between relying on oneself (self-benefit) for enlightenment and praying to Amitabha for protection (benefit from others).

**Christianity:** Christians worship Jesus Christ as the Savior of humanity and believe in the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christianity forbids the creation of idols since God is spirit and cannot be seen by the human eye. Christians believe that God, being the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent creator of the universe, should be worshipped in spirit and truth. The Bible states, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He chose for His inheritance” (Psalm 33:12). This means that any nation that acknowledges God as its Lord is blessed, as are the people He has chosen as His own.

**Cultural Comparison:** Chinese Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist traditions are human-centered, unlike the God-centered approach of Christianity. Modern Chinese people often start their lives with Confucian ideals, emphasizing engagement in the world and personal ambition: “cultivate oneself, manage one’s family, govern the country, and bring peace to all under Heaven.” They motivate themselves with the principle “as Heaven’s movement is constant, a gentleman should strive relentlessly.” When many reach middle age and realize their ambitions may not be fulfilled, they often turn to Daoist teachings, embracing “go with the flow and find peace in what comes.” In old age, they may adopt a Buddhist perspective that “everything is empty.”

**Chinese Values:** These values are focused on the present life and are human-centered, emphasizing practicality and utilitarianism.

## **II. On the Concept of Humanity:**

### **1. Concept of Humanity:**

**Buddhism:** Buddhism holds that people vary in social status and worth, viewing humans as the result of reincarnation. A person may have been an animal in a past life and could become one again in the future. In belief, Buddhism promotes equality among all beings, with the idea that anyone can become a Buddha. While Buddhism claims to respect all living beings equally, it lacks a distinct recognition of human dignity and responsibility, essentially equating humans and animals. This perspective suggests that humans have no special dignity or value, potentially serving as an excuse for irresponsible behavior and leading to the abuse of human rights. It implies that one’s main concern is self-interest without the obligation to take on greater responsibility for the world.

This belief undermines the value and responsibility of humans, making it difficult to uphold human rights. Because Buddhism is inherently atheistic, there is no supreme divine presence to impose moral restraint, resulting in power without limits, life without responsibility, and belief without reverence for a higher being.

**Buddhist Worship:** In China, Buddhism often takes the form of idol worship, with offerings and rituals akin to bribing deities to fulfill personal desires. This type of practice can lead to corruption in cultural and religious faith, which can extend to social and systemic issues. The contrast between Buddhist and Christian-majority countries reveals this clearly.

**Christianity:** Christianity teaches that humans are created in the image and likeness of God, giving them inherent dignity. Humans are seen as children of God, created equal, and tasked with stewardship over the earth. Unlike animals, humans are considered living beings with a soul. The belief that all people are created in God's image supports the idea that everyone is equal and that human rights should be protected by law and government. Governments are seen as tools for executing God's will and are elected by the people to serve them.

From the perspective of human nature, Christianity acknowledges that humans, after the Fall, have an inclination toward corruption and sin. Thus, systems must be in place to limit human power. A combination of structured systems and faith-based teachings is needed to restrain power and mitigate human moral decline. Consequently, governments are subject to both faith and public oversight.

Countries and regions influenced by Christianity or deeply impacted by Christian culture generally have democratic systems. These nations tend to have stable democratic governance and systems, a more peaceful society, effective checks on power, and better protection of human dignity and value.

In contrast, countries where Buddhist culture is dominant tend to be more closed and underdeveloped, with autocratic political systems and social instability. Even in cases where such countries adopt democratic systems, these are often influenced by Western Christian nations rather than derived from their own religious beliefs.

## **2. Human Nature:**

**Buddhism:** Buddhism holds that human nature is inherently pure and good, but it becomes obscured and corrupted by various material desires. By believing in Buddha and strengthening moral and religious cultivation, individuals can remove these obscurations and restore their original Buddha-nature, attaining eternal life in the Pure Land. Buddhism teaches that everyone has the potential to become a Buddha. Zen Buddhism even claims that Buddha-nature is human nature itself, and enlightenment comes from seeking within oneself rather than looking outward; by directly understanding one's mind, one can suddenly realize Buddhahood.

**Christianity:** In contrast, Christianity leans more towards the belief that human nature is fundamentally flawed. The doctrine of "original sin" asserts that the root of sin lies within human beings themselves. Humans are sinful because they are inherently self-centered and unable to escape this nature. "Sin" in Christianity refers not to legal or social wrongdoing but to a state of inner suffering caused by self-centeredness and indulgence in material desires. This is the concept of original sin, which Christianity views as the source of all evil and the cause of profound suffering in the world. Humanity must endure suffering because of this inherent sinfulness. Therefore, the basic distinction between Buddhism and Christianity on human nature can be summarized as a view inclined towards good (Buddhism) versus a view inclined towards evil (Christianity).

## **3. Soteriology:**

**Buddhism:** There is no concept of a redeemer who dies for the sins of the world. People must bear the consequences of their actions (karma), and redemption is not possible. If one sins, there is no way to

undo it or an opportunity to repent, only the bearing of consequences, which can lead to despair and, potentially, more severe sin and deeper guilt.

**Christianity:** Christianity holds that human nature is entirely corrupted, and everyone has sinned, with death as the result of sin. Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, died on the cross for the sins of humanity. Redemption is available to all who believe and accept Him. This belief provides the opportunity for repentance, avoiding despair. By faith, one is justified, finding hope in Jesus and the possibility of a brighter future, becoming a good person who contributes positively to the world and others.

#### **4. Suffering and Ultimate Purpose:**

Suffering (苦罪论):

**Buddhism:** Suffering is an inherent part of life and is universal. The roots of suffering are found in human nature, specifically in greed, anger, and ignorance.

**Christianity:** Suffering stems from human sin. When individuals succumb to desires (temptation), they sin, resulting in spiritual death and suffering. Collective sins can also impact others.

Ultimate Purpose (终极论):

**Buddhism:** Nirvana. Liberation can only be achieved through self-effort by eliminating desires (the "seven emotions and six desires") and accumulating good deeds until reaching complete merit. This leads to freedom from the cycle of rebirth, or potentially becoming an Arhat

**Christianity:** Eternal life in Heaven. Through the redemption of Jesus Christ and accepting Him as the Savior, sins can be forgiven, allowing individuals to enjoy the kingdom of God prepared for them.

### **III. Worldview and Outlook on Life:**

**Worldview:**

**Buddhism:** Buddhism takes a detached view of the world, seeing it as filled with suffering that arises from the karma and deeds of sentient beings. The world is seen as a product of conditions and causes, without purpose or plan, where everything is impermanent (the four elements are all empty). For Buddhists, there is no appreciation of the created beauty of nature or any divine grace. This worldview tends to be withdrawn and escapist, focusing solely on personal existence without embracing fundamental human responsibilities. In terms of epistemology and the concept of truth, Buddhism holds that all things are relative and that there is no absolute truth. Knowledge and understanding are achieved through sudden enlightenment (satori).

**Christianity:** Christianity holds both an immanent and transcendent view of the world. The world is seen as created by God, with purpose and intention. Humans are considered God's stewards, entrusted to manage and care for the world. This view encourages people to study and appreciate nature as a way of understanding God's creation, using their talents—seen as gifts from God—to benefit the world and



others. Christianity encourages fulfilling roles and responsibilities, such as being good parents, workers, or members of society, thus creating greater value and serving others. Epistemology and Concept of Truth in Christianity: Truth is understood through divine revelation, with the Bible considered the ultimate source of this revelation.

### **Outlook on Life:**

**Buddhism:** Buddhism sees life as inherently full of suffering, summarizing this view in the "eight sufferings." The goal of life is to escape this cycle of suffering and avoid future rebirths, viewing existence as a burden. The founder, Shakyamuni Buddha, is seen as having left his family to seek enlightenment and find ultimate bliss. Work and worldly duties are generally regarded as distractions to be avoided.

**Christianity:** Christianity views life with optimism, believing that God's original creation was good. Music, art, and science are considered worthy pursuits, and people should serve their families, societies, and the world with dedication. The more one does to contribute positively, the more one glorifies God. Christians believe life has purpose: to live in a way that reflects God's image, bears witness to His glory, and fulfills His will. This faith instills an active, responsible attitude, inspiring individuals to embrace their duties, such as being a good parent, spouse, or teacher. Unlike Buddhism's escapist tendencies, Christianity sees work as a calling, an opportunity to use one's potential in ways that please God.

### **View of Wealth:**

**Christianity:** As a result, the Christian view of wealth believes that people are not the masters of wealth, but only stewards. Therefore, people cannot appropriate wealth as their own, but must let wealth earn greater profit, thereby enhancing the value of people. In this regard, John Wesley said: "Gain all you can! Save all you can! Give all you can!" Strive to earn as much as possible, be as frugal as possible, and give as much as possible. This ethical view will certainly generate positive social energy. It allows people, while earning wealth and enhancing value, to better understand the true meaning of wealth—to glorify God and benefit society. Therefore, the Christian faith leads people to create greater value and also establish a welfare system.

The Christian faith believes that work is God's sacred calling, a vocation. Jesus even wanted people to use the gifts given by God to earn greater value—receiving five talents and then earning another five; receiving two resources and then earning another two—life should be a life of multiplication. People should be creative like God. Use their gifts to the fullest. The Christian faith believes that work aligned with God's will glorifies God and exemplifies excellence, being a testament to God.

**Buddhism,** due to its passive and escapist thought, has a dualistic tendency of viewing material as evil. Therefore, it not only does not encourage people to strive to earn value but instead wants people to be passive and avoid the world, not to take on responsibility. Thus, in the Buddhist world, it is basically not possible to form a welfare society, at most doing some good deeds to accumulate merit. It is not about creating a system where everyone can use their gifts, everyone is cared for, and everyone is respected, to glorify God. For example, in Buddhist beliefs, the gap between rich and poor and social hierarchies are easily formed. It also cannot motivate people like the Christian faith to explore the universe and

understand nature. Therefore, in terms of economy and technology, Buddhist culture has made little achievement.

#### **IV. Organization and Forms of Worship:**

##### **Organization:**

**Buddhism** emphasizes that "a person becomes a Buddha," highlighting the self-discipline of the believer's mind and not emphasizing any particular organizational control. Most Buddhist followers focus on personal spiritual cultivation and individual enlightenment, rather than characteristics of social life organization and constraints. Sometimes, Buddha is also regarded as a deity, and Buddhism requires its own temples as objects of worship, but this is merely a commemorative form of worship. Buddhism envisions a path of liberation that originates from the self yet transcends the self, creating a belief system without a god.

**Christianity**, as a church religion, emphasizes the organization of the believers' lives and forms of fellowship, with churches, congregations, and even denominations as the main bodies. It focuses on the institutionalization of the interaction between individuals and church organizations on a spiritual level, where mutual assistance and love among people in the church allow them to feel the presence of Jesus Christ. Within church organizations, a set of religious life systems and ritual norms are constructed. For this reason, Christianity has its special rituals. Believers must accept "baptism" to show loyalty to Christ and repentance for their sins, symbolizing the start of a new relationship and being a sign recognized by God, receiving the Holy Spirit.

##### **Forms of Worship:**

Westerners go to church for confession, while Chinese people go to temples for offerings. People enter churches for free to listen to sermons, confess their souls, and receive guidance and teachings; entering temples, however, involves spending money on incense offerings, seeking blessings, fortunes, promotions, and good luck. The former is for soul communication and elevation, purifying the mind; the latter uses money to seek more benefits and advantages.

In China, nearly every famous scenic spot has a temple. Temples seem to have become money trees for local governments, so even if there were none before, one would be built later. Some say it is a new business that requires no technology, no factory, and relies on the idea of temples to make huge profits from others' piety and faith. Some even say that nowadays, Buddhas are not like Buddhas anymore, becoming "wealth-attracting Buddhas"; monks are not like monks, turning into fake monks; temples are not like temples, becoming places to collect money.

Churches, unlike temples in China, are free and do not charge an entrance fee. If you attend a church service, is it like a temple where you offer some incense money? Worship does not require money. The church is solemn and dignified, a place where people atone for their sins and give thanks to God, serving as a sanctuary for purifying the soul. Western churches, even those with tourists, remain solemn and quiet, with guides speaking softly and visitors observing in silence, without loud noise.

Both churches and temples accept donations from believers, which is a similarity. However, churches are much more reserved in their approach; you will never see a donation box placed in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary. Donations are often made privately, with a check written directly to the church. Donations are used for the maintenance of religious sites and also for church schools and hospitals. In foreign churches, there is no distinction between the rich and the poor, no smell of money; one only needs a sincere heart to enter, not money. Westerners also visit churches mainly to listen to sermons by priests and seek inner peace.

## **V. Cultural Influence:**

Historian Toynbee once said: "Religion is the essence of culture, and culture is the expression of religion." This shows that religion fundamentally influences a society. The type of religion determines the type of culture, the type of culture determines the type of system, and the type of system determines the type of society.

Because religion shapes culture, this bribery-like idol worship can lead to cultural decay and corruption. This explains why, in general, corrupt officials are more likely to worship Buddha and not Christ.

Christian culture is quite the opposite. Theologically, it holds that God is unique, holy, all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving. Therefore, in terms of culture and behavior, it promotes self-discipline because God is watching us; it encourages striving because God is creative; it promotes holiness because God is holy; it gives hope because God is loving and capable of solving human problems. Worshipping God involves confessing and repenting for sins. When people come before God, they would not dare to bribe, but instead, seek guidance and direction. Therefore, Christian culture is always filled with creative positive energy.

By comparing the aforementioned countries, we can clearly see the impact of different religions on culture. The culture influenced by the Christian faith is relatively open, proactive, and rigorous. In contrast, Buddhist culture is relatively passive and backward, even leading to cultural and religious corruption.

The Bible says, "You will recognize them by their fruits." By comparing the different impacts of religions on society and life, you can see their essence in the background. I am reminded of the Bible verse: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance" (Psalm 33:12).

## **Conclusion:**

Overall, Christianity is a religion of engagement with the world, while Buddhism is a religion of withdrawal. One of the core doctrines of Christianity is belief in the afterlife, teaching that only by receiving God's grace can a person's soul achieve salvation in the next life. However, this is only one aspect of Christian belief. In Christianity, a person should restrain desires, help others, and reduce sin in their lifetime to have a chance of entering heaven after death.

Buddhism is typically a religion of withdrawal, both in its Mahayana and Theravada forms. According to Buddhism, life itself is suffering—referred to as "the suffering of life." Examples include the suffering of birth, aging, illness, and death, as well as the suffering of separation from loved ones, meeting what one hates, and more, known collectively as the "Eight Sufferings." Life is considered filled with boundless suffering and troubles, such as the pursuit of fame, wealth, desires, and worldly attachments. In Buddhism, the ultimate and best solution for escaping life's troubles is achieving Nirvana through cultivation.

However, Nirvana in Buddhism is almost equivalent to the cessation of life or can be considered the end of life. Upon reaching Nirvana, all human life activities, such as desires, sensations, reason, thoughts, and subconscious, cease; even if physical life persists, spiritual awareness cannot be perceived it. This state of experience resembles that of death.

Comparing Christianity and Buddhism shows significant differences in their life attitudes; this difference is a key reason why the number of Christian believers far exceeds that of Buddhists. Protestant Christianity is centered on God, ethical, worldly, self-restraining, and particularistic; in contrast, Buddhism is universe-centered, mystical, otherworldly, mystical, and universalistic. Despite being widespread in China for two millennia, Buddhism has not helped China overcome prolonged periods of civilizational stagnation or integrate into the modern global cultural movement. Countries such as South Korea, Japan, and Thailand also have deep Buddhist histories, yet Buddhism has not helped their nations achieve modernization.

Every individual inherently has a sense of religious feeling, even if that feeling does not reveal who God is. Intuitively, we know there is a God: "Since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God..." In a church, you may feel a profound sense of peace. When praying at school, there is an inexplicable joy; you enjoy speaking to God, knowing He hears your prayers.

Jesus Christ clearly told us, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus Christ is the light of human life, and only through Him can we know the truth and recognize the true God, avoiding the confusion of diverging paths. Indeed, the world is filled with noise and many diverging paths, often leaving us unsure of what to choose. Yet, the Lord Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you." In Christianity, God is kind and upright, guiding sinners on the right path. "Whoever fears the Lord, the Lord will instruct them in the way they should choose."

If you truly seek the truth, God will ensure that you find it.